



**Oneida Health**  
*exceptional care... always*

November 23, 2020

Dear Fellow Employees,

Governor Andrew Cuomo warned New Yorkers on Sunday that he expects COVID 19 infection rates to climb throughout the holiday season and shortly after, potentially reaching dangerous levels unseen since the height of the pandemic this spring. I started today's update with that from the Governor so that everyone is aware that we remain in a serious pandemic and we here in Oneida are starting to see a continued spike in positive results. Included in those positive results are individuals who are totally asymptomatic yet carry the virus. With that said, it is important that we turn up our response within this organization to this spike in infections in order to protect ourselves, our patients and residents. This update will denote some changes in our approach.

Please note the following:

1. Testing- As I have communicated previously, we are running short on rapid testing kits which has resulted in our having to move towards the PCR testing that currently is sent out to Quest Laboratories. The problem with the send out tests is the inability of Quest to turn the results around in a timely fashion. It is taking most of the time 4-5 days and often longer to receive a result. In the meantime, which actually happened, an asymptomatic COVID positive patient is wandering around our organization not knowing they are COVID positive because the results have not been returned. We are working diligently to see if we can bring the PCR testing in house but that comes with the challenge of finding test kits for that equipment. Some hospitals do have that equipment but cannot secure adequate testing kits to use it which helps no one. The rapid testing will still be used on symptomatic employees and those returning from travel who need to start work once again. We will continue to use the rapid testing for admissions and other episodes where an immediate result is necessary. We need to use the rapid tests appropriately as we are unsure of future delivery of those test kits. Our vendor has often gone silent when we request that they provide us with additional kits per our purchasing contract with them. Very frustrating.
2. Work from Home- We are embarking on another period of time where we will allow individuals to work from home if and only if they can perform their duties at home in an effective and appropriate manner. You should discuss this with your manager to determine if you are indeed eligible to work from home. Even a small number of individuals working from home will help reduce traffic within our healthcare organization which will allow us to isolate more effectively.
3. Lunch and Other Breaks- We continue to see individuals going to the café or else to certain lounges within our organization to have their break and/or lunch. As you know, during that time, the mask needs to be removed. I ask that you please work with your co-workers to schedule your breaks so that a limited number of people are in the break area at any one time and that would then allow for proper distancing of at least 6 feet between individuals. As stated

earlier, some of us may be COVID positive and not know it because we are asymptomatic. I think we need to treat everyone within our organization as potentially COVID positive understanding that most of us are not but we can't afford to take any unnecessary chances these days. Please work with your manager on this so that we can properly isolate when masks are not being worn.

4. COVID Vaccination- US healthcare workers and others recommended for the nation's first COVID 19 inoculations could start getting shots within a day or two of regulatory consent next month. This was reported by a top official of the Government's vaccine development effort. We have readied ourselves to receive the vaccines and are working on a plan to provide those who are interested in receiving it with the vaccine as soon as feasible.
5. Recent COVID Testing Results- We performed 8 rapid tests yesterday with 1 positive. We also received 162 results from Quest, 9 positive. We currently have 301 tests pending with Quest. The majority of those (197) are from our practices. We have 2 COVID positive inpatients and are now up to 5 hospital deaths due to COVID. We remain COVID free in our ECF in this very challenging time which is great. We have tested 16,744 individuals, 344 positive, 16,093 negative and as I already reported, 301 pending.

I sent last week the CDC guidelines which recommend that we not have anyone not living in our current home setting over for Thanksgiving dinner. I realize how difficult a decision that will be for many of you. Please understand that we remain in a very difficult pandemic and each one of you is important in our ability to meet the needs of our patients and residents moving forward. If there is a spike, which is predicted, it will be all hands on deck once again.

I will continue to communicate over the next 2 days what is happening in regards to our testing capabilities as well as results. Please feel free to address any questions to my attention.

Thank you once again for continuing to provide exceptional care to our patients and residents.

With Sincerest Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gene F. Morreale".

Gene F. Morreale